

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-07

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FM AMCONSUL BELFAST

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1780

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PINS, UK, EI

SUBJECT: SECRETARY OF STATE BEGINS CONSULTATIONS ON
INTERIM STEP TOWARD DEVOLUTION

REF: (A) LONDON 15622, (B) DUBLIN 2312

1. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND ROY MASON
OCTOBER 5 BEGINS FORMAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NI POLITICIANS
ON AN INTERIM STEP TOWARD FULL DEVOLUTION OF AUTHORITY TO
NI (REF B). THERE HAVE ALREADY BEEN SOUNDINGS WITH
THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY, BUT THE FIRST
FORMAL APPROACH WILL BE TO OFFICIAL UNIONIST LEADER
HARRY WEST. WE GATHER (REF A) THAT THE GENERAL
IDEA OF AN ELECTED BODY TO TAKE AUTHORITY OVER HEALTH,
HOUSING AND EDUCATION WILL BE CONSIDERED AND THAT THE
SPECIFICS (E.G., POWERS OF AN ASSEMBLY, FORMATION OF AN
EXECUTIVE, GUARANTEES TO MINORITY REPRESENTATIVES) WILL BE
ADDRESSED IF THERE IS A PROSPECT OF MOVEMENT.

2. SHOULD THERE BE QUICK AGREEMENT, LEGISLATION MIGHT BE
DRAFTED AND APPROVED BY PARLIAMENT FAST ENOUGH TO CALL
PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS EARLY IN 1978. AGREEMENT IS NOT LIKELY
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TO COME THAT FAST, HOWEVER, IF INDEED IT IS POSSIBLE AT ALL.
NOR DOES MR. MASON PROBABLY FEEL THE NEED TO MOVE THAT QUICKLY,
SINCE THERE IS LITTLE PRESSURE FROM PUBLIC OPINION IN FAVOR OF
IMMEDIATE DEVOLUTION. NEVERTHELESS, HMG IS COMMITTED TO
EXPLORE THE SUBJECT, AND THE ATMOSPHERE MAY APPEAR PROPITIOUS
AFTER THE CALLAGHAN-LYNCH MEETING CONFIRMED BILATERAL
COOPERATION, AND IN VIEW OF EVENTS IN THE US.

3. MOREOVER, MR. MASON MAY BELIEVE THAT THE SECURITY SITUATION WARRANTS ANOTHER POLITICAL MOVE. ALTHOUGH SHOOTINGS OF SECURITY PERSONNEL AND FIRE BOMBINGS CONTINUE, SEPTEMBER WAS THE FIRST MONTH SINCE 1971 IN WHICH NO CIVILIAN WAS KILLED IN A SECTARIAN TERRORIST ACTION. THERE IS TALK THAT THE PROVISIONAL IRA MAY BE GIRDING TO LAUNCH A WINTER CAMPAIGN. WITHOUT BEING COCKY, THE SECURITY FORCES SEEM TO THINK THEY COULD QUICKLY CONTROL SUCH AN OFFENSIVE, WHICH MIGHT LEAD THE PIRA TO A CHRISTMAS TRUCE AND EVEN A CEASE FIRE.

4. IN THE MEANTIME, THE SPATE OF BRUTAL DISCIPLINARY MEASURES BY THE PIRA CONTINUES. THERE SEEM TO BE SEVERAL FACTORS: TO STOP INFORMATION LEAKING TO THE POLICE, DISCOURAGE PETTY CRIME IN CATHOLIC AREAS (A POINT MADE BY THE PIRA PUBLICLY) OR PUNISH AGENTS WHO KEEP BOOTY FOR THEMSELVES, AND FOR INFRACTIONS OF DISCIPLINE SUCH AS INVOLVEMENT WITH THE WIFE OF AN IMPRISONED PROVISIONAL, OR TRYING TO LEAVE THE ORGANIZATION. THAT CONDITIONS IN PIRA NECESSITATE SUCH BRUTALITY MAY BE TAKEN AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS, BUT THE PUNISHMENTS ALSO MIGHT RESULT IN A TIGHTER ORGANIZATION, BETTER ADAPTED TO RENEW THE BATTLE.

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